

Beit Shemesh Residents Await Historic Mesamche Lev Distribution

BY: FRIMET BLUM

Mesamche Lev's annual Pesach distribution has become a fixture in Yerushalayim's pre-Pesach scene. The sight of thousands of Jews flocking towards the distribution is a yearly marvel; and the excited chatter of hordes of children clutching shoe boxes almost drowns out the ubiquitous honks of drivers navigating impossibly clogged roads.

The distribution typically attracts families from every corner of the land. But this year, the residents of Beit Shemesh won't be there. Thanks to an anonymous

donor who sponsored a large part of the cost, Mesamche Lev will be hosting a satellite distribution in Beit Shemesh, where over 1,500 poor families, including more than 12,000 children, will get the same Pesach necessities as their counterparts in Yerushalayim. They will receive everything they need for Yom Tov, including meat, wine, grocery coupons and shoes.

The community of Beit Shemesh includes many poor Torah families who struggle to feed their children. It also includes American *olim* who left comfortable lives in the States in favor of the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Moshe T., a distinguished *kollel yungerman* and *mechaber sefarim*, left his comfortable New Jersey home for the privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael. He lives in a tiny, cold apartment with his wife and nine children; and is grateful to his parents for paying his rent. But they would be shocked to know that his children don't eat *fleishigs* from Shabbos to Shabbos, and that the children wear their shoes for months after they start complaining that their toes pinch. He is delighted that the distribution is coming to his hometown.

"It's *mamash* a *mechaye*," he says. "There's no *she'eilah* that Mesamche Lev is making our whole Yom Tov. We'll get everything we need. Meat, wine, groceries, and of course, shoes. It's a *gevaldig* thing that we're getting shoes. The children can't wait. And it's being here in Beit Shemesh is a real bonus. I don't have to miss a single *seder*." The Beit Shemesh distribution will go a long way towards bringing *simchas Yom Tov* and peace of mind to the city's needy families.

Although the Beit Shemesh event will fill a large hall, it will be miniscule compared to the main event in Yerushalayim. There, the logistics of the distribution are mind-boggling. At this very moment, 42,000 children are walking down aisles of shoes, carefully arranged by style,

size, and whether they're for boys or girls. The shoes are quickly disappearing, as the children choose top-quality, fashionable leather shoes to replace their pinching, worn-out, snow-damaged footwear.

"My daughter's old shoes are so worn; they fall off her feet like slippers," says Dina H., a widow from Bnei Brak. "Now she chose brand new navy flats with tan piping, just like the ones she admired in a store window. She is so happy. Thank you." Overwhelmed with emotion, Dina wipes away a tear, and thanks the organization for bringing her children joy.

"It's not easy to make my children happy," she said. "But you did it. You brought orphans *simchah*." For Mesamche Lev, it's par for the course. By week's end, the *simchah* operation will enter its second stage. Instead of shoe boxes, there will be cases of meat, poultry, wine, and grape juice — awaiting pickup by throngs of recipients who will carefully set them aside for the *Seder*. There will also be grocery coupons redeemable at local stores.

The event is a magnificent display of *ahavas Yisrael*. Generous Jews from every corner of the world sponsor coupons, which are given to poor families. The poor use the coupons to "purchase" meat, groceries, and shoes — making Mesamche Lev donors directly responsible for all the joy at the distribution. The distribution has been "Bringing *Simchah* to Life" for over 40 years, and was the brainchild of Rabbi Zalman Ashkenazi, z"l, the

How Much Is 42,000?

42,000 children would fill:

Every seat in Citifield (capacity 41,922)

800 school buses

1680 classrooms

42,000 shoe boxes would:

Stretch more than halfway across Manhattan

(9 miles!)

legendary founder of the organization. It is distinguished not only by the sheer scope of the distribution, which gives families virtually everything they need for Pesach, but also by the focus on maintaining the dignity of the recipients. It is *tzedakah* at its finest.

In recent years, Mesamche Lev's work reached close to home as well, with its American programs serving an ever-growing number of families from our area. In addition to distributing funds to 368 widows in Eretz Yisrael, the organization has helped close to 150 American widows with generous checks.

That is besides subsidizing 46,000 pounds of *matzah* for more than 2,000 large families in Boro Park, Williamsburg, Flatbush, Lakewood, Monsey, Monroe, and New Square. The families purchased the *matzah* at half-price; paying just \$12 a pound for expensive brands that retail at \$25 dollars. The high-tech automated phone system that served those seeking to buy discounted *matzah*, at 718-705-6500, was flooded with calls from the moment it was

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opened.

Mesamche Lev also distributed shoe coupons to over 1,000 American *kollel yungeleit*, offering them a 50 percent discount in local shoe stores and dry goods stores.

To participate in what is almost certainly the largest worldwide Maos Chittim operation, send your contribution to Mesamche Lev, 1364 53rd Street, Brooklyn, New York, 11219; or call 718-506-1400. You can also download meat, grocery, and shoe coupons at mesamchelev.org.

Giant Tnuva Trailers to Unload in Mesamche Lev Locations; Dairy Products Greatly Discounted

Mesamche Lev will be making a major difference to thousands of families in three locations this Pesach, by greatly subsidizing dairy products *lichvod* Yom Tov. Three giant trailers filled with Tnuva dairy products will unload their goods at Mesamche Lev distribution locations in Eretz Yisrael this Sunday, offering expensive Yom Tov basics at half-price. The events will take place in Shomrei Emunim, Ezras Torah, and Beit Shemesh, and will be a major source of sustenance to thousands.

Families are very excited about this project, a Mesamche Lev initiative valued at 1,500,000 NIS.

Libby E., a Beit Shemesh-mother of nine, is looking forward to buying *leben* and yogurt.

"It's going to be a real treat for my children," she says. "In my house, *leben* is a specialty. I buy it for birthdays. Now it'll be for Yom Tov." She'll also buy plenty of milk, butter, soft cheese, and sliced cheese — another expensive item she splurges on only occasionally.

"My husband is in *kollel*, and we have a very small grocery budget," she says. "I buy two bags of milk, and it has to last all week. On Pesach, I always wish I could buy dairy products, to add variety to the menu. This is the first time I'll

be able to do that." Hadassah I. of Meah Shearim says that her children barely know what these products taste like.

"When I told them about the sale, my girls went to the *makolet* to study the dairy case. They wrote down for me exactly what they want. My six-year-old can't stop asking if I can buy her chocolate milk."

The dairy products program will add yet another dimension to Mesamche Lev's massive Pesach distribution, and demonstrates the organization's commitment to "Bringing *Simchah* to Life" for thousands of families.